



# ADDRESS

TO THE

# PEOPLE OF CANADA

BY

## SIR JOHN A. MACDONALD.

*To the Electors of Canada :—*

GENTLEMEN,—The momentous questions now engaging public attention having, in the opinion of the Ministry, reached that stage when it is desirable that an opportunity should be given to the people of expressing at the polls their views thereon, the Governor-General has been advised to terminate the existence of the present House of Commons and to issue writs summoning a new Parliament. This advice His Excellency has seen fit to approve, and you, therefore, will be called upon within a short time to elect members to represent you in the great council of the nation. I shall be a candidate for the representation of my old constituency, the city of Kingston.

In soliciting at your hands a renewal of the confidence which I have enjoyed as a Minister of the Crown for thirty years, it is, I think, convenient that I should take advantage of the occasion to define the attitude of the Government—in which I am First Minister—towards the leading political issues of the day. As in

1878, in 1882, and again in 1887, so in 1891 do questions relating to the trade and commerce of the country occupy a foremost place in the public mind. Our policy in respect thereto is to-day what it has been for the past thirteen years, and is directed by a firm determination to foster and develope the varied resources of the Dominion by every means in our power consistent with Canada's position as an integral portion of the British Empire. To that end we have laboured in the past, and we propose to continue in the work to which we have applied ourselves, of building up on this continent, under the flag of England, a great and powerful nation.

When in 1878 we were called upon to administer the affairs of the Dominion, Canada occupied a position in the eyes of the world very different from that which she enjoys to-day. At that time a profound depression hung like a pall over the whole country, from the Atlantic ocean to the western limits of the province of Ontario; beyond which to the Rocky Mountains stretched a vast and almost unknown wilderness. Trade was depressed; manufactures languished, and, exposed to ruinous competition, Canadians were fast sinking into the position of being mere hewers of wood and drawers of water for the great nation dwelling to the south of us. We determined to change this unhappy state of things. We felt that Canada, with its agricultural resources, rich in its fisheries, timber and mineral wealth, was worthy of a nobler position than that of being a slaughter market for the United States. We said to the Americans:—"We are perfectly willing to trade with you on equal terms. We are desirous of having a fair reciprocity treaty; but we will not consent to open our markets to you while yours remain closed to us."

So we inaugurated the National Policy. You all know what followed. Almost as if by magic the whole face of the country underwent a change. Stagnation and apathy and gloom—aye, and want and misery, too—gave place to activity and enterprise and prosperity. The miners of Nova Scotia took courage; the manufacturing industries in our great centres revived and multiplied; the farmer found a market for his produce; the artisan and laborer employment at good wages, and all Canada rejoiced under

the quickening impulse of a new-found life. The age of deficits was past, and an overflowing treasury gave to the Government the means of carrying forward those great works necessary to the realization of our purpose to make this country a homogeneous whole.

To that end we undertook that stupendous work, the Canadian Pacific railway. Undeterred by the pessimistic views of our opponents, nay, in spite of their strenuous and even malignant opposition, we pushed forward that great enterprise through the wilds north of Lake Superior, across the western prairies, over the Rocky mountains to the shore of the Pacific, with such inflexible resolution that in seven years after the assumption of office by the present administration the dream of our public men was an accomplished fact, and I, myself, experienced the proud satisfaction of looking back from the steps of my car upon the Rocky mountains fringing the eastern sky.

The Canadian Pacific Railway now extends from ocean to ocean, opening up and developing the country at a marvellous rate, and forming an imperial highway to the East, over which the trade of the Indies is destined to reach the markets of Europe. We have subsidized steamship lines on both sides of the ocean — to Europe, China, Japan, Australia and the West Indies. We have spent millions on the extension and improvement of our canal system. We have, by liberal grants of subsidies, promoted the building of railways, now become an absolute necessity, until the whole country is covered as with a network, and we have done all this with such prudence and caution that our credit in the money markets of the world is higher to-day than it has ever been, and the rate of interest on our debt, which is the true measure of the public burdens, is less than it was when we took office in 1878.

During all this time what has been the attitude of the Reform party? Vacillating in their policy and inconstancy itself as regards their leaders, they have at least been consistent in this particular, that they have uniformly opposed every measure which had for its object the development of our common country. The National Policy was a failure before it had been tried. Under it we could not possibly raise a revenue sufficient for the

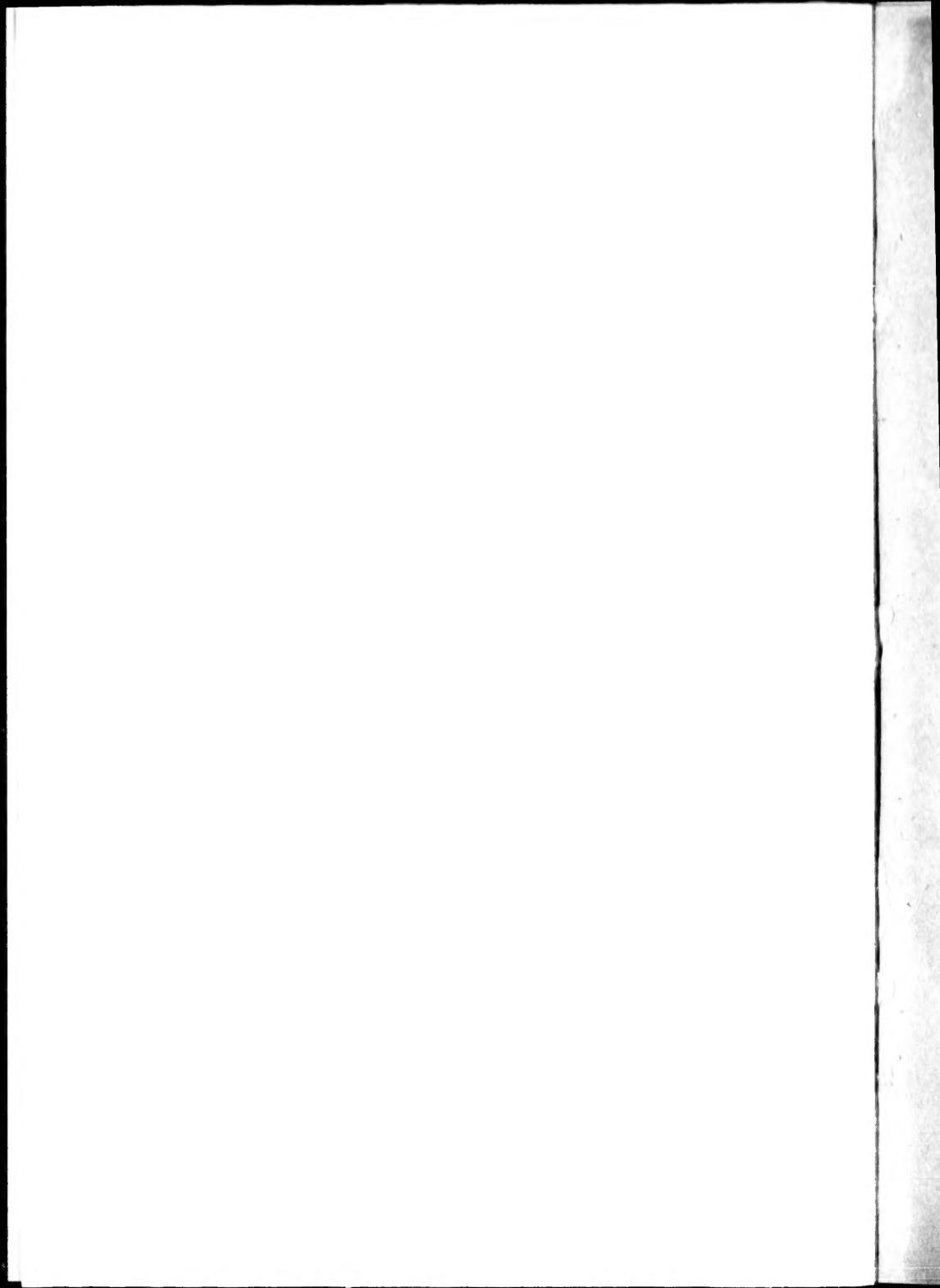
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public requirements. Time exposed that fallacy. Then we were to pay more for the home manufactured article than we used to when we imported everything from abroad. We were to be the prey of rings and of monopolies, and the manufacturers were to extort their own prices. When these fears had been proved unfounded we were assured that over-competition would inevitably prove the ruin of the manufacturing industries and thus bring about a state of affairs worse than that which the National Policy had been designed to meet. It was the same with the Canadian Pacific Railway. The whole project, according to our opponents, was a chimera. The engineering difficulties were insuperable; the road, even if constructed, would never pay. Well, gentlemen, the project was feasible, the engineering difficulties were overcome, and the road does pay.

Disappointed by the failure of all their predictions and convinced that nothing is to be gained by further opposition on the old lines, the Reform party has taken a new departure and has announced its policy to be Unrestricted Reciprocity—that is (as defined by its author, Mr. Wiman, *North American Review* of a few days ago) free trade with the United States and a common tariff with the United States against the rest of the world.

The adoption of this policy would involve, among other grave evils, discrimination against the Mother Country. This fact is admitted by no less a personage than Sir Richard Cartwright, who in his speech at Pembroke on October 21st, 1890, is reported to have said:—"Some men whose opinions I respect entertain objections to this (unrestricted reciprocity) proposition. They argue and argue with force, that it will be necessary for us, if we enter into such an arrangement, to admit the goods of the United States on more favorable terms than those of the mother country. Nor do I deny that that is an objection and not a light one." It would, in my opinion, inevitably result in the annexation of this Dominion to the United States. The advocates of unrestricted reciprocity on this side of the line deny that it would have such an effect, though its friends in the United States urge as the chief reason for its adoption that unrestricted reciprocity would be the first step in the direction of political union.

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There is, however, one obvious consequence of this scheme which nobody has the hardihood to dispute, and that is that unrestricted reciprocity would necessitate the imposition of direct taxation, amounting to not less than fourteen millions of dollars annually, upon the people of this country. This fact is clearly set forth in a remarkable letter addressed a few days ago by Mr. E. W. Thompson—a Radical and free trader—to the *Toronto Globe*, on the staff of which paper he was lately an editorial writer, which, notwithstanding, the *Globe*, with characteristic unfairness, refused to publish, but which, nevertheless, reached the public through another source. Mr. Thompson points out, with great clearness, that the loss of customs revenue levied upon articles now entering this country from the United States, in the event of the adoption of unrestricted reciprocity, would amount to not less than seven millions of dollars annually. Moreover, this by no means represents the total loss to the revenue which the adoption of such a policy would entail. If American manufacturers now compete favourably with British goods, despite an equal duty, what do you suppose would happen if the duty were removed from the American and retained, or, as is very probable, increased, on the British article? Would not the inevitable result be a displacement of the duty-paying goods of the mother country by those of the United States? And this would mean an additional loss to the revenue of many millions more.

Electors of Canada, I appeal to you to consider well the full meaning of this proposition. You—I speak now more particularly to the people of this Province of Ontario—are already taxed directly for school purposes, for township purposes, for county purposes, while to the Provincial Government there is expressly given by the constitution the right to impose direct taxation. This latter evil you have so far escaped, but as the material resources of the province diminish, as they are now diminishing, the Local Government will be driven to supplement its revenue derived from fixed sources by a direct tax. And is not this enough, think you, without your being called on by a Dominion tax gatherer with a yearly demand for \$15 a family to meet the obligation of the Central Government? Gentlemen, this is what unrestricted reciprocity involves. Do you like the

prospect? This is what we are opposing, and what we ask you to oppose by your votes.

Under our present system a man may largely determine the amount of his contributions to the Dominion exchequer. The amount of his tax is always in direct proportion to his means. If he is rich and can afford to drink champagne he has to pay a tax of \$1.50 for every bottle he buys. If he is a poor man he contents himself with a cup of tea, on which there is no duty. And so on all through the list. If he is able to afford all manner of luxuries he pays a large sum into the coffers of the Government. If he is a man of moderate means, and able to enjoy an occasional luxury, he pays accordingly. If he is a poor man his contributions to the treasury are reduced to a minimum. With direct taxation, no matter what may be the pecuniary position of the tax-payer—times may be hard—crops may have failed—sickness or other calamity may have fallen on the family, still the inexorable tax collector comes and exacts his tribute. Does not ours seem to be the more equitable plan? It is the one under which we have lived and thrived, and to which the Government I lead proposes to adhere.

I have pointed out to you a few of the material objections to this scheme of unrestricted reciprocity, to which Mr. Laurier and Sir Richard Cartwright have committed the Liberal party, but they are not the only objections, nor, in my opinion, are they the most vital.

For a century and a half this country has grown and flourished under the protecting aegis of the British Crown. The gallant race who first bore to our shores the blessings of civilization passed by an easy transition from French to English rule and now form one of the most law-abiding portions of the community. These pioneers were speedily recruited by the advent of a loyal band of British subjects, who gave up everything that men most prize and were content to begin life anew in the wilderness rather than forego allegiance to their sovereign. To the descendants of these men and to the multitude of Englishmen, Irishmen and Scotchmen who emigrated to Canada, that they might build up new homes without ceasing to be British subjects—to you, Canadians—I appeal, and I ask you what have you to gain by

surrendering that which your fathers held most dear? Under the broad folds of the Union Jack we enjoy the most ample liberty to govern ourselves as we please and at the same time we participate in the advantages which flow from association with the mightiest empire the world has ever seen. Not only are we free to manage our domestic concerns, but, practically, we possess the privilege of making our own treaties with foreign countries and in our relations with the outside world we enjoy the prestige inspired by a consciousness of the fact that behind us towers the majesty of England.

The question which you will shortly be called upon to determine resolves itself into this, shall we endanger our possession of the great heritage bequeathed to us by our fathers and submit ourselves to direct taxation for the privilege of having our tariff fixed at Washington, with a prospect of ultimately becoming a portion of the American union?

I commend these issues to your determination and to the judgment of the whole people of Canada with an unclouded confidence that you will proclaim to the world your resolve to show yourselves not unworthy of the proud distinction you enjoy, of being numbered among the most dutiful and loyal subjects of our beloved Queen.

As for myself, my course is clear. A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die. With my utmost effort, with my latest breath, will I oppose the "veiled treason" which attempts, by sordid means and mercenary proffers, to lure our people from their allegiance. During my long public service of nearly half a century I have been true to my country and its best interest, and I appeal with equal confidence to the men who have trusted me in the past and to the young hope of the country, with whom rests its destinies in the future, to give me their united and strenuous aid in this my last effort for the unity of the Empire and the preservation of our commercial and political freedom.

I remain, gentlemen,

Your faithful servant,

JOHN A. MACDONALD.

Ottawa, 7th February, 1881.